

APA-TECH

#78

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APA Policies:

- Minac (Minimum level of activity required) is two somethings per year.
- Issues will be mailed the first week of even-numbered months, so contributions must reach me by the first day of the month. Things received after the first of the month will be held until the next scheduled mailing.
- The next deadline is June 1st, 1992.
- The copy count is twenty-two (22).

Your current postal account is a mystery to me, since my computer is down. Postal account information will be included with the next issue, even if I have to pull the accounts of the machine without the aid of the monitor!

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TRANSPORTER
TOPICS

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Number 66

Things have become interesting at work, in the sense of the Chinese curse. The division director was recently arrested for showing pornography to pre-teen boys and trying to lure (and perhaps force) one of them into his car. This is after a couple of previous warnings, when he was caught in similar activities in the same neighborhood. And here I thought he was just incompetent.

Anyway, they have picked a substitute for him, an acting director who will reign until a permanent one is chosen. The former director has moved out of state, with his family, after receiving a light sentence. While I take no pleasure in his being caught, there is now hope that our division will receive proper management.

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The talk of major reductions in the state work force seem to have come to nothing. One theory is that this was a bluff so that we would object less to not receiving an annual increment this year.

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Good news and bad news. I have gained ten pounds over the past four month, and now weigh 165, the most ever. I have been trying to gain weight for about twenty years, and this is the largest increase in about 15 years. The bad news, probably unconnected, is that I have developed arthritis in my upper spine. My Mother has this, in the same place, so when the pain started I had a feeling this was the reason. Arthritis runs in her family, so I was expecting to get this eventually - just not for another ten years or so! Fortunately, it is mild so far, and is treatable with exercise, hot pads, aspirin and cod liver oil. By the way, when cod liver oil goes bad, how do you tell?

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Mailing Comments

Dr. Gonzo: GAFIA is an occupational hazard for fans. * I have often said that if I gained the power of teleportation I would buy a lot of one-way plane tickets. * I have done a lot of

travelling in the continental US, and I know that we aren't homogenous. * Aha! Independent confirmation of Boyle's Law! *

Call Der Mann (Obscure joke. A local lawyer has adds on TV and radio which answers questions concerning what to do about legal problems with the refrain "Call the man!"): I'm sorry to hear about your computer problems, but this just highlights something I've remarked on before. Windows is a great way to fill RAM and make your computer run slower. If you want to multitask, get an Amiga. It does this through hardware, not a software trick. * I used to have a ham license, but let it lapse after I discovered that most of the discussion that takes place on the air is of a type I am not interested in. I guess both members of a family having tickets does create and added incentive. *

Elevator Cleaner (Bill Aitch): The "Crewcut Republican Engineers" mailing list? I think I'm on that, too, and me a registered Democrat. * It is interesting how fandom interconnects. I know Chris Dunn from his work in "The Centaurs Gatherum" and Barr Wars. I was surprised to see his article in a recent Pyro. * Enclosed herein is "Murder at the Shapeshifters' Ball." Note that The Society of Shifters is based loosely on early SF fans, clubs and conventions. * Re. Yr. Cmmt Audrey: A friend, after proofreading a MS for me, remarked that I was perfectly consistent in my use of "its" and "it's." I was wrong every time. *

Crumbcrunchers: Interesting. Your grandmother has the potential to have lived in three centuries. * Regarding Dora's mishaps, in his autobiography, Chuck Yeager relates that for a short period during his test pilot career his daughter had so many accidents (such as sticking a fork in an electrical outlet) that it seemed her life was more hazardous than his. *

Hobson's Choice: Definitely keep cartoons and story illustrations. * The format is fine. * Cellarman was fun, and interesting. At one point I thought it was going to turn into an "Idiot Story" but the author had the main character take a reasonable precaution before confronting the main villains. *

Dead Men's Letters: I still haven't heard from Ace books. I am told this is a good sign; it has made it through the slushpile readers and is going further in the hierarchy. Either that, or they've lost it. * Re. Yr. Cmmt. Susannah: My karate instructor is an ordained Baptist minister. He is convinced that Christ studied in India during the "missing" years. * Whew! Next time, warn me before you start in on such a scholarly treatise! And sideways, yet! *

Last Second: This should have been the title of my 'zine this time. Okay, I know I'm late. Hopefully, not too late. * Always

backup before optimizing. Of course, you know that, now. (-: *
I'm still trying to obtain AMIGA DOS 2.02. * See above about my
opinion of Windows. * You ought to read "The Skeptical Inquirer"
for more on pseudo science masquerading as the real stuff. This
approach is seductive to those with too little education or
motivation to discriminate. *

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6305 Words
First publication rights

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Rd*

MURDER AT THE SHAPESHIFTER'S BALL

by

Rodford Edmiston

John Florinsson had expected his entrance to cause a stir, and he was right. As soon as he had cleared the security devices at the foyer entrance to the penthouse suite of David Hanely, this year's host, heads started turning. John had waited over a year and a half for this, and undergone three months of inconvenience, discomfort and occasional angst just for tonight. He was convinced that he would win the prize for "Best Technical Achievement" with his centaur.

"Wow!" said Charlotte Brandenburg. She made him wait while she looked him all around, finally standing back and just staring, with a goofy smile on her face. "You've done an incredible job."

John had taken the classic Greek myth, beard and all, and made it real, using his own body as the medium. He currently stood about three meters tall and massed nearly a metric ton. The human torso was modeled after an actual Greek statue, found buried just eight years earlier. The equine portion had been inspired by Medieval warhorses. As a final touch, all of the hair, both on the human head and on the equine body, was shiny black. In spite of all the changes, though, the face was still recognizable as John's.

"One of the biggest problems was learning to walk again," John told Charlotte. "The algorithms I programmed into the neural structure didn't work nearly as well as I had thought they would."

People waved and pointed as John walked slowly through the suite, those who were looking at him calling to those who had not seen him yet. As he stepped out onto the patio and into plain view of the main body of guests, there was a collective intake of

breath, followed by scattered applause. From this crowd, that meant a great deal.

"Legend comes to life under the stars," called out someone John didn't recognize. He seemed more than a little drunk. "The night is full of magic!"

John carefully made his way over to the snack table, using his height advantage to get a good look at the competition. Most shifters didn't have the dedication and motivation to endure the problems involved with a major change, and could generally be dismissed from the contest for "Best Technical." Only a handful of people had, like John, performed radical changes to their structure. Most of the somaforms present were the usual assortment of people with minor alterations; duplicates of celebrities, a lone caveman, and several wolfmen and people in various other anthropomorphic guises. Some of these would be eligible for "Best Artistic," "Best Recreation" or one of the other prizes, which were much coveted in their own right, but John wasn't interested in those. He was, after all, in the business, and winning the technical award would certainly not hurt his career.

John spotted a familiar figure at the snack table, and moved toward him.

"Congratulations," said Tom Sarant, handing John a drink. "You had talked about this for years, but I didn't think you could bring it off. Uh, you can drink, can't you?"

Tom belonged to the group, which made up about a third of those at the party, whose members preferred changes more subtle than overt somaforming. He specialized in bioluminescent displays, and generally glowed in various colors of light. This time, however, John noticed that Tom had done something different. The biologist's skin was aswirl with patterns of multiple colors, which changed slowly with time and Tom's movements. It was an interesting and challenging effect, and one which was probably lost on the majority of the attendees.

"Yes, I can drink," John replied, with a wry grin. "Believe me, growing this form wasn't easy. Even after I had worked out all the details for the change, I still had to get access to the proper equipment to make the assemblers and monitor my progress. Fortunately, my boss at Preservation Research agreed to let me use their gear, if I would sign a contract stating that the company would have first refusal on any commercial applications."

"That sounds like a good deal," said Tom.

He looked like he was going to say more, but they were interrupted by a commotion at the entrance. The crowd parted to make way for a leathery-winged, humanoid form, which looked like a giant bat. It was Marla Clost. She had finally delivered on her long-promised flying human.

"There goes 'Best Technical,'" sighed John.

Marla had extended the bones of her arms and fingers, to support wings of skin that ran between her arms and legs. Her hands were located about halfway out, with the bones of the last three fingers on each side extended and strengthened to carry the outer sections of the wings. That left her with just a thumb and forefinger, on hands located an awkward distance from her mouth, to use for manipulation. For flight stability, there was a flap of skin stretching from her buttocks, down between her legs, and to the middle of her calves. She had been wearing a cloak, which she had thrown off at her entrance, and now stood naked before them. Not that she had much to conceal. She had no breasts, or even nipples, and only a smooth stretch of skin between her legs. John wondered if she were routing her urine through her rectum, like a bird.

Marla had always been a small woman, and now she was even smaller. She stood at under a meter and a half, and looked painfully gaunt. She smiled triumphantly at the crowd, producing a death's-head grin enhanced by her total lack of hair.

John was ignored as people either rushed to examine and congratulate Marla, or simply began talking about her achievement. John, himself, didn't feel any resentment. He had known that his victory wasn't guaranteed, and that Marla was one of the prime contenders. In fact, his basic emotion right now was grudging admiration tinged with envy.

"One for the archives?"

John turned to see Wilson Smith, with his camera ready. John drew himself up and put on a fierce expression, and Wilson snapped the shot.

"Are you ever going to switch to electronic media?" John asked him, grinning.

"If they ever get it to the point where it is better than film," Wilson replied, snapping another couple of shots. "I'm taking advantage of Marla's entrance, since you're so big that I have trouble getting all of you in a crowd."

"It's crowded, all right," John remarked, looking around. "It gets worse every year."

"Yeah, I'm afraid we'll have to start charging for membership instead of asking for donations," Wilson sighed. "And maybe have a pre-judging on the forms competition. It takes too long now."

Wilson finished getting his pictures, then wandered off in search of more victims. Marla was still the center of attention, and there didn't seem to be much else going on, so John took consolation in appeasing his considerable appetite. He had made his new form as efficient as possible to reduce the inconvenience caused by fueling it, but he still ate a lot. After John had stuffed himself at the munchies table, he gathered a large handful of vegetables and began mingling, to get a better look at the other attendees. Eventually, he and Marla came together in

the press of the crowd. She seemed almost embarrassed when she saw him.

"I just wanted to congratulate you on your accomplishment," she told him, raising her voice to be heard above the party noises. "A shame we both had to make our breakthroughs at the same time."

"How long did that take?"

"Four weeks," Marla replied, with more than a trace of smugness. "I discovered a couple of interesting shortcuts, at least one of which has commercial possibilities. I'll send you the documentation... after I've got the patents."

"What do you think of the rest of the competition?" John munched a celery stalk, then continued when it seemed that Marla wouldn't speak. "I don't see anyone in our class for 'Best Technical' but there are several possibilities for some of the other categories."

"Adlai will win 'Best Artistic,'" said Marla. "He always does, and with good reason. One of the three Elvises will get 'Best Re-Creation;' its tradition."

They talked a while longer, then someone came out to announce that Adlai was ready to make his appearance. John and Marla headed toward the suite, to watch the unveiling, but neither of them was particularly fast. In John's case, it was because he was afraid of stepping on someone. Marla's form was simply awkward. They wound up together at the rear of the crowd. This was no problem for John, with his height, but Marla was the shortest adult there. After a quick discussion, John hoisted Marla onto his equine back, where she stood, holding his shoulders for balance. John was astonished at how light she was.

The crowd hushed as the lights dimmed, leaving only a set of floods pointed at the sliding doors to David's living room, and a row of temporary walkway lights flanking the path to the stage. There was a recorded blare of trumpets, and the door opened. Adlai walked slowly, grandly onto the patio.

"He" had changed gender and was now "she." This in itself was nothing new. The rest of the form, however, was. She was beautiful, as much a creature from mythology as John. She was tall and lithe, with pale green skin and dark green hair, slightly pointed ears and cheekbones so high and fine that she looked other - better - than human. She wore only a translucent gown, which accented her attractiveness rather than concealing it. John suddenly found himself glad he had designed his current form to be sexually non-functional; an erection in public could be embarrassing for a centaur.

Even the women in the room were entranced, as Adlai continued her graceful walk across the patio. She was an artist by trade, and had worked in nearly every medium available in the middle of the twenty-first century, including her own body. No one who saw

her now could doubt that she was her own best canvas.

Finally, she reached the stage. She flowed smoothly up the steps, accepted the microphone from the chief judge as if it were her royal scepter, and spoke to the crowd.

"Ladies and gentlemen," she announced, in a voice that sounded the way honey tastes, "shapeshifters of all persuasions, let the Ball begin!"

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"Has anyone seen Adlai?" asked Lyle Thompkins. "John, you're the tallest one here. Can you see her in the crowd anywhere?"

John shook his head. It was getting late and he was feeling sleepy and not all that alert.

"What's the problem?"

"Well, the votes have been counted and the judges are ready to award the prize, but no one can find Adlai." Lyle frowned.

"It's not like him - I mean her - to miss the awards, even if she isn't in the running, and especially if she is."

"Has anyone looked in the apartment?" John asked.

"Not yet," Lyle replied. "We thought she might be - uh - busy. You know."

"Well, she should be finished by now," said John, grinning. "I'll look in the kitchen. I told Betty I'd bring some more snacks out anyway, since I ate most of them."

"Good. I'll try the living room." Lyle turned and headed toward the sliding doors.

John entered the kitchen and took a quick look around for Adlai there and in the adjoining rooms. She was not in sight, so John began filling a tray with various munchies, nibbling as he worked. He was nearly finished when he heard the yell. John hurried awkwardly through the house toward the noise, and was perhaps the fifth one to arrive at the master bedroom in answer to it. He stared with Lyle and a couple of others at the scene in the bedroom: David, standing and gaping in shock, and Adlai, lying on the floor, with her beautiful, delicate skull battered to fragments.

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Detective Bledsoe had commandeered the dining room for interviewing the party guests. There were a lot of them, which meant that this murder had more suspects than most. Bledsoe finished entering the data on number forty-one, and looked up at his assistant, Officer Kzir.

"Okay, who's next?" Bledsoe asked.

"Dr. John Florinson. He's a biochemist who works at Preservation Research, in Knoxville, Tennessee." Kzir continued

with the pertinent information, which Bledsoe dutifully entered into his spreadsheet.

It was an unusual scene for a murder. David Hanely was a respected man in Chicago, coming from a wealthy family with deep roots in the community. He was a businessman and entrepreneur, and no one doubted his financial acumen. Unfortunately, he had some strange hobbies. One of those had now led to a murder being committed in his penthouse, and Hanely was a suspect.

The Detective finished his entry, then had Records confirm the information and send a picture of the individual in question. Bledsoe just hoped the guy actually looked like this. After what he had already seen tonight, that was by no means certain.

"Okay, send him in."

John watched the caveman leave the dining room, and knew his turn was next. In spite of the situation, John couldn't help but look at him in consternation. The caveman, for his part, gave John a glare and continued silently on. John shook his head; the man's outfit and attitude just didn't fit in with the usual Shifter crowd. Still, there were a lot of newcomers at the Balls lately, and many of them were short-term faddists rather than dedicated Shifters. A lot of these newcomers were rude, loud and ignorant of tradition. Was tonight's violence a result of all the strangers who had joined recently?

John had heard complaints about these people at recent Balls, but had dismissed such talk as nostalgia. Now he wondered if he had been wrong, and had the sinking feeling that some sort of exclusion process was about to begin.

John was brought back to the present as he heard his name called. He stepped forward, tail swishing nervously.

The door to the patio opened, and Detective Bledsoe started, then stared, as John Florinson entered.

"So far tonight, I've interviewed eight celebrity look-alikes, two wolf-men, a cave man and a guy with glowing skin," Bledsoe grumbled, after he recovered. "Don't you people have anything better to do?"

John's ears turned red, but when he replied his voice was steady.

"Excuse me, Detective, but do you have any hobbies?"

"Well, yeah," he responded, confused by the unexpected question. "I collect and restore antique clocks."

"Wouldn't your time be better spent if you gave that up, and concentrated on catching criminals?"

To John's surprise, the man chuckled.

"Point taken, Mr. Florinson." He offered John his hand, standing to close the gap in height. "I'm Detective Wendel Bledsoe, Homicide. And I hope you can sit down; I'm getting a crick in my neck."

Bledsoe resumed his seat behind the table he had taken over

as a makeshift desk, and John settled himself in front of it, tucking his four legs almost primly under his bulk. This put his head only slightly higher than the policeman's.

"Now, then, just a few routine questions," the Detective began. He asked John where he had been at certain times, if he had seen anything unusual or suspicious, and so forth, continuing for several minutes. "I understand that you were one of those who found the body."

"That's right," the biochemist replied, nodding. "I heard David yell and went to see what was wrong."

"That would be David Hanely," Kzir supplied.

"That's right." John gestured down at his bulk, and smiled wryly. "I'm not very maneuverable like this, I'm afraid. I was about the fifth one there, and was at the back of the group, but I'm tall enough that I could see Adlai."

"Please describe what you saw."

John swallowed, looking a bit grey, but continued.

"She was lying on the floor, her skull crushed. David was standing over her, horrified."

John's eyes were distant, as he saw in his mind that bizarre scene. Adlai, with her beautiful, delicate skull a shattered mess, the stain slowly spreading on the carpet, and David, looking like a stereotypical Satan, frozen in shock.

"You told the officer that you knew Mr. Darlin was dead. Your actual words were 'crushed beyond repair.' How did you know that?"

"I've done a lot of work with neural repair assemblers," John explained. "I know terminal brain damage when I see it."

He looked down at his hands, shaking his head.

"What a waste. Adlai was a great sculptor. He was also one of the few people with genuine artistic talent to take up Shifting. Now, he's gone."

"Why did he change himself?" Bledsoe asked, curious. "Why not design the change and have someone else take it?"

"That's the attraction of being a Shifter," John explained.

"You get to be whatever you want."

"Do you think Hanely did it?" said Bledsoe, getting the inquiry back on track.

"No," said John, firmly. "Aside from the fact that I don't believe David could commit murder, he was in plain view for over an hour before we noticed that Adlai was missing. When we found her, the blood was already drying. There wasn't time for that, between when we started looking and when David yelled."

Bledsoe had already eliminated Hanely as a first-rank suspect for other reasons, and decided not to go into all the ways he could have arranged the murder, then pretended to "discover" it later. Instead, he asked a few more questions, then told John he could rejoin the group on the patio.

"Do you know why Adlai was killed?" John asked, as he rose to leave.

"Robbery, probably," Bledsoe replied. "The robotler did a quick inventory, and there are several valuable items missing. There may also have been rape involved. The initial report says there was fresh semen in the victim's vagina."

If the Detective was being bluntly clinical in an attempt to shock John into revealing something, it was wasted. Indeed, John was worried about shocking Bledsoe.

"It probably wasn't rape," John told him, wondering how the officer would take the next bit of information. "A lot of shifters like to take advantage of a temporary gender change. In fact, I would say that was why Adlai left the party."

To John's relief, this didn't even seem to phase the man.

"We'll take DNA prints from everyone, anyway, and match them against what we got from the semen." The Detective suddenly looked thoughtful. "Or will that work with your crew?"

"It should," John told him. "Shifters are required by law to keep their DNA type unchanged, except for legitimate therapeutic alterations."

"That's a relief," said Bledsoe. "Assuming, that is, the murderer didn't break that law, too."

"How long are you going to keep us here?" asked John. "I mean, there's no hurry, we usually party until late anyway, but I would like to know."

"Mr. Hanely's security system locked the place up tight when he hit the alarm, so the odds are that our killer is still in the penthouse," said the Detective. "As of now, I intend to keep this suite sealed until we have caught the culprit."

The idea that the murderer could still be among them caught John by surprise, and just as obviously worried him. What if the killer became desperate and tried to hurt someone else? Several of the forms being worn here tonight were rather fragile. He quickly said goodbye and left, tail switching.

"Okay, who's next?"

"Dr. Marla Clost. She's a biological researcher at the University of Kentucky."

"Send her in."

Marla walked in and gave the detective a nervous grin.

"Three more years 'till retirement," muttered Bledsoe, staring. "Just three more years."

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John walked back out to the deck, feeling uneasy at the thought that not only had one of their group committed murder, but that the killer was still close by. Was this a result of all the newcomers who had joined in the past couple of years?

The conversation around the pool was hushed. If nothing else, this was the quietest Shapeshifter's Ball which had ever been held. John found himself eyeing the other members. He knew most of them by sight, even with their altered forms. Over half of these people had, like John, been attending the Balls for more than six years. He found it difficult to believe that any of them could perform a deliberate act of violence. That left those he didn't know. He tried to be discrete with his observations, but was not very successful. It didn't matter; most of the people there were going through the same routine. John gave a wry smile when he caught a wolfman eying him with suspicion.

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Bledsoe was through with his interviews and was waiting for the report from forensics, when one of the officers keeping watch on the crowd came running in to tell him that there was a fight.

When he reached the patio, Bledsoe could see that the matter was already under control. The two apparent combatants were being held apart - and up on their toes - by Florinson, who had a tight, smug grin on his face. One of the culprits looked like Abraham Lincoln, the other like Ghandi; a strange pair to be caught in a fist fight. Hanely fluttered nearby, trying to control the situation.

"What's going on?" demanded Bledsoe.

"Just a case of nervous tempers," David hastily explained, as he stepped forward to meet the detective. "We're all on edge."

Bledsoe was having a hard time keeping a straight face. Hanely's satanic appearance was completely at odds with his mannerisms.

John set the two men down. After giving each other sullen looks, they separated, moving into the crowd.

"You'd make a hell of a bouncer," commented Bledsoe.

"Look, Detective, can't we get this over with?" someone in the crowd asked.

"I'm working as quickly as I can," Bledsoe announced, raising his voice so that the immediate crowd could hear him. "I know this isn't easy on you, but it has to be done right. The more you cooperate, the sooner you will be out of here."

Bledsoe looked around for a moment, to see if there were any more questions, then went back inside. The others in the cluster dispersed, merging back into the party.

"Any progress being made?"

John jumped, then turned to see Tom standing beside him.

"Not much," John told him. "How many more does he have to interview?"

"Just Wilson and Charlotte," said Tom. He heaved a big sigh, but said nothing more.

"How can you be so calm?" John asked his friend. "David's right; this group is stretched to the breaking point."

"I'm working on solving the murder," Tom replied. "We know about when it occurred. I'm excluding everyone who has at least two independent witnesses who can definitely place them elsewhere at that time. So far I've been able to clear about a third of the party."

He grinned up at John.

"You'll be happy to know that you were one of the first eliminated. You're just too big to escape notice."

"That's impressive," replied John, remembering that Tom was famous for his ability to create mental arrays of data.

Eventually, John wandered over to an empty portion of the deck, near the balustrade, to look at the stars. The clean air blew past him in a strong updraft as John gazed toward the zenith. He remembered his father remarking, more than once, about how it used to be impossible to see the stars from inside a city because of all the light pollution. John had trouble understanding why anyone would aim a light upwards.

"Beautiful."

John turned with a start, and almost stepped on Marla. She jumped back, then laughed.

"Sorry about that," John muttered. "I've got to start paying more attention."

"I shouldn't be so timid," Marla replied. "Considering the materials I had to use in this form, I'm probably the only one here you don't have to worry about hurting."

"Graphite fiber reinforcement?" asked John. "Or one of the new polymers?"

They talked shop for a few minutes, the routine keeping their thoughts away from the circumstances. Finally, though, they both fell silent, staring out at the night sky.

"You know," said Marla, suddenly, "it may not be robbery."

"You mean it may have been something personal?" John found it hard to believe that any shifter would kill Adlai from jealousy or because of some snub.

"Not that," Marla corrected. "I mean something in his business dealings. He made a lot of enemies on that Hy-Flight stock mess two months ago."

"I haven't the slightest idea what you are talking about."

Marla gave John a puzzled look.

"It was in all the papers," she explained. "There was an official enquiry into what he knew and when. He was cleared, but there was a lot of bad blood about it."

"Two months ago, I was deep into the final preparation for this form," John told her.

"Well, let's just say that some people consider revenge for blowing a deal that costs them a lot of money as a sufficient

motive for murder."

If Marla was right, that meant the murderer was most likely a hired professional. That made John feel a little better; such a person wasn't likely to panic and try to take hostages, or blindly strike out at anyone in the way. However, it also meant that the killer was less likely to be caught. John heaved a huge sigh, his equine chest expanding noticeably.

"Such a shame," said Marla, echoing John's sigh. "Not only that Adlai is dead, but that such beauty has been defiled. She was perfect; slim, elfin and ethereal."

John turned and gave her a puzzled look. He had known Marla for nearly five years, and had never heard her talk like this before. Normally, she was impish; bright and brassy.

"You sound almost jealous."

"I guess I am." Marla shrugged. "I am not and never will be artistic, but I can appreciate what looks good."

John nodded in understanding. With her narrow features, pointed ears and coloration done all in shades of green, Adlai's "Fairy Queen" had been the hit of the party. John sighed again, and turned to look at the people clustered around the pool and stage. Most of them seemed afraid to leave the lit area, and John couldn't really blame them.

As he gazed at the forms present, John saw the caveman again, and wondered why anyone would pick such a ridiculous form. Shifters occasionally took on a truly ugly guise as a joke, but that was rare, and this fellow wasn't unpleasant enough to be funny. Yet there he was, although his club was missing. John froze. His club was missing!

"What's wrong?" asked Marla.

"I need to find Tom," John told her. "I think I know who the killer is."

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Tom heard John out and nodded thoughtfully.

"I had just about come to the same conclusion. He's one of the five I haven't been able to alibi. Not only can no one say where he was for some time before or after the murder, no one here knows him."

"Well, its obvious, now that you think about it," said Marla. "The guy just doesn't fit. I think we need to see the Detective."

Bledsoe was polite but skeptical.

"Aside from the fact that he was carrying an appropriate weapon which is now missing, what makes you think that this man is the killer?"

John had explained his idea quickly, almost in a panic. He felt that every minute which went by with that man free increased the danger. He tried to think of some way to quickly convince

Bledsoe that he was right. Then, suddenly, it came to him.

"If you could look like anything you wanted," John said slowly, with emphasis, "would you look that ugly?"

Bledsoe straightened, a thoughtful expression on his face.

"You could be right. You know better than I who wouldn't fit in with this group, and it's more likely that an outsider would cause trouble than one of your own." He looked John in the eye. "Now, how do we get this guy separated from the crowd without alerting him?"

"Can't you just dart him?"

"Won't work," said Bledsoe, shaking his head. "Too many people in the way, and even the best knockout juice available would still give him time to hurt someone. Besides, we only have a hunch that he is the perp. I want to question him, not provide grounds for an assault charge."

"I've got it," said John. "Have Lyle announce that the awards for the shifting contest are going to be given. Everyone will bunch around the stage. This guy has been hanging on the edge of the group all evening; your crew can move in and escort him away without anyone else getting near."

"I wish I could think of a better plan," said Bledsoe, after several minutes of musing, "but I can't. All right, we'll do it."

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The crowd was already buzzing as the Detective called Lyle aside and talked quietly to him. Lyle then jumped up onto the stage and activated the PA.

"May I have your attention, please! To give us something to do while the police work, the Detective in charge is allowing us to continue with the awards ceremony. So everybody gather around, and let's end the suspense!"

There was some grumbling about disrespect for the dead, countered by remarks that it was what Adlai would have wanted. The shifters began to walk slowly toward the stage, the buzz of conversation and the confusion of their movement providing an excellent distraction and cover for Bledsoe's people.

John never learned what it was that alerted the caveman. It could have been that the police began their move too soon, or that he saw someone watching him. It could have been simple paranoia.

Whatever the trigger, the caveman suddenly turned and sprinted towards the far side of the deck, toward the fire escape. Since there were police units stationed around the building, he most likely would have still been caught, but John supposed that the man wasn't thinking rationally just then.

Not all of the shifters were at the stage, several being in the path of the caveman. Marla Clost, awkward in her radically

altered form, was one of these.

The caveman spotted her. He swerved and scooped her light body into his arms, something silvery white glinting in his right hand. He turned to face the police, holding the white thing at Marla's short throat. She looked more surprised than frightened.

"Ceramic knife," said Detective Bledsoe, analytically. "Detectors wouldn't pick it up. Looks like he was expecting trouble."

"All of you, stay back!" the caveman shouted. "I want a tiltrotor here in five minutes, or bat girl learns to smile with her throat."

"Take it easy," said Bledsoe, calmly. "No reason for anyone else to get hurt. It's not like there's was still a death penalty."

"You think I'm going to let them play with my mind, like they did my brother?" the man yelled. "When they were through with him, he couldn't even squash a bug! Now get that chopper here!"

Bledsoe stalled by asking the man whether he wanted a helicopter or a tiltrotor, then by asking for other details of his demands. While the caveman's eyes were on the detective, two of the police officers tried to sneak towards him. Unfortunately, the man saw them. He lifted Marla's thin form off the ground, both to use as a shield and to give him a better angle with the blade.

"You think I won't do it?" he screamed. "I've already killed one freak tonight; she'll be next if you don't stay away."

Marla grabbed his right arm with both of hers, then pushed hard while kicking backwards with her feet. She was much stronger than she looked; startled, and stunned a bit by the unexpected blow, the caveman dropped her. Marla jumped up and ran, towards the fire escape, the caveman chasing her. He was much faster; despite her head start, Marla could not make it to the slide before he caught her.

John, seeing this, grabbed a folding chair and lobbed it at the man. He missed, but the chair came close enough to make his target dodge and stumble. Marla reached the safety gate and yanked it open, setting off an alarm. John thought that Marla would jump down the tube, and wondered if her wings would get tangled. Instead, she pushed the slide assembly aside and dropped into open space. There was a collective gasp from the crowd; then they heard a muffled sound, like a sail catching a breeze, or a parachute opening. Marla came soaring back into sight, wings spread, lifted by the breeze blowing up the side of the building.

John tore his eyes away from the glorious vision of unassisted human flight, to see the caveman knock down the only police officer between himself and the chute.

Several other people, not all of them police, also saw this, and most of them made a run for the criminal. John was the

fastest by far.

It didn't take much courage. After all, the man's only weapon was a knife, and John massed over eight hundred kilos. His motivation wasn't heroism, or even anger. It was outrage, pure and simple. This savage had killed a friend, and had threatened to kill another.

John charged. The caveman was almost at the slide as John approached. Any sane person would have dodged, or tried to surrender. The murderer whirled, knife ready. John grabbed for him and missed. The caveman slashed at John's abdomen, but also missed. John reared, trying to crash down on the man with his forelegs. He missed again, and felt a flash of agonizing cold as the blade, more by accident than design, plunged deep into his side, under the torso ribs. The pain overwhelmed John for a moment; then the neural limiters he had designed into his form tripped, and all he felt was the alien sensation of something cold and hard sticking into his body. Fighting a wave of nausea, John slapped the man's hand away, leaving the knife for later. He grabbed the murderer by the neck, and lifted him to eye level.

"Surprise. All my vital organs are in the horse part."

By the time the police got there the man was turning blue, and John showed no sign of letting go.

"Florinson!" Bledsoe yelled. "John! You're killing him!"

The Detective's words penetrated more deeply than the knife had. John dropped the man, then backed numbly away.

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"Our caveman's name is Keith Barren," said Bledsoe, as he and John shared coffee beside the pool. The sun was just coming over the horizon, and both men looked wasted. "He's a known petty criminal. The alias he gave during questioning was good enough to pass a casual check, but we were able to ID him from his retina prints, once he was under arrest."

"So we were right. He wasn't a Shifter," said John, tiredly. "Just an ugly man in makeup and a costume."

Detective Bledsoe nodded. The police doctor on the scene had treated John's wound, with direction from John and words of advice from a number of kibitzers, and had given him a pain killer. It was early in the morning, and most of the guests had left. The awards ceremony had been cancelled; the list of winners would be mailed out later, along with the prize certificates. John had stayed to see the end of the situation, and because the police needed his statement.

"He saw an article on the ball in the news, and decided that this would be an easy job," the Detective explained. "Mr. Darlin surprised him, and was killed to eliminate a witness."

John shuddered. He could understand his own act of violence,

committed in the heat of the moment, but how anyone could deliberately kill someone else just because it was convenient was beyond him.

"We found the stuff he stole," Bledsoe continued. "He dumped it down the laundry chute."

"Then why didn't he slide down after it and escape?" asked John.

"He probably didn't think of it," Bledsoe remarked, with a sour expression. "He comes from a family that has routinely refused counseling and genetic correction. So far, there hasn't been enough cause to get a court order forcing them to submit. I think that will change after this."

John had often questioned the need to so violate someone's rights, but now he wasn't certain it was wrong, at least in cases like this.

"How long, I wonder, until we have flushed all of these people from our society?"

"If we're lucky, never," was Bledsoe's surprising answer. "Properly channeled, that sort of aggression can be of great benefit."

He grinned tiredly, leaning back in his chair.

"Besides, I'd be out of a job!"

End

Dr. Gonzo's ...

Valli Hoski
to ApaTech, March 1992,
who is temporarily on assignment in Indianapolis at
225 E. North St., Tower 1 #1304, Indianapolis IN 46204
evenings (317) 686-3488 // days (317) 276-9869
(NOTE: this is not a COA!)

Here we go again. Same format but another disty. Hey if it works, don't break it.

I. Oh, the places we've been

Since the last issue, I've actually seen a *real Irish pub in St. Louis*. Really good Irish music, authentic even. Terrific Guinness (on draft!) and a polite, but cheery crowd. McGurk's @ 12th and Russel. St. Louis still surprises me with its ethnic endearingness.

Then there is *The Neighborhood Ice Cream Parlour*. Crown's Candy @ 14th and St. Louis, just north of downtown. Great malteds, sundaes, and they even have home-made candies like chocolate-covered orange peels. Go ahead, be good to yourself. In a neighborhood that you don't go after dark, but a place that is frequented by locals and police lieutenants. (You figure it out.) Looking around the buildings outside, this is an old section of St. Louis. Right behind the buildings (kind of tenement row shaped) are low shed-like structures, all lined up in a horizontal row. Too narrow to be garages, maybe are gardening sheds today. Years back, these were the toilet facilities. Only thing missing is the barn for the horse. This is indeed, old St. Louis. Buildings like these in Chicago have long since burned down.

St. Louis is getting light rail. Yessiree, in these days of renewed interest in mass transit, St. Louis started their planning early. The light rail system will even go over the

Mississippi River. And it will resurrect some historic trackage from the old Wabash line. While cruising down Delmar avenue, Joa and I pass a neat building for rent. It sits on a viaduct, seems to lead down to railroad tracks, looks like a passenger station, says "Wabash Railroad", must be a railroad building. Sure enough, this is the Delmar station on what was the Wabash Railroad, where most Wabash passenger traffic always stopped before heading north and out of St. Louis. (Keep in mind this meant that the Wabash would pull out of downtown St. Louis, go west and then north and back east again to cross the Mississippi. You figure it out. All I know is that Peter sez so, and he knows it all. About railroads at least.) And so here we are. A stretch of the light rail system is being laid on the old Wabash right of way, and so this line will hum again to the sound of clacking wheels and bustling passengers. Almost makes me want to open a cafe and newstand in the old station, just to have a good reason to sit and watch the trains go by all day long.

The University Heights *area out by Washington University* is a real architectural jewel of a residential neighborhood. Designated a landmark historic district, this area has trees, extensive lawns and homes of the prosperous, planned, middle-class American communities of the 20s and 30s. The shopping and club area around the university has a flavor that adds to St. Louis' charm. Three used book stores, a 50s hangout for burgers, various club and non-fern-bar places to hang out. This is where

When the going gets
weird, the weird turn
pro.

-Hunter S. Thompson
(creator of Dr.
Gonzo)

you go to feel connected to the university culture. Good area to hang out in.

Add in *Ted Drewes'* frozen custard stand (6726 Chippewa), the brick *bungalowed* suburbs and *Dino* the dinosaur's smiling face (at the green and red Sinclair gas stations), and you know why I like St. Louis. America needs more towns like this.

II. Things to say

But first, some Qs I want to ask, but will not write much about now:

1. I adore *Jeremy Brett as Sherlock Holmes*. Does anyone else watch the Granada Television version of the Sherlock Holmes series? The Adventure of the Lonely House made me cry with the touching, personal and still very proper restraint with which the Holmes and Watson characters displayed their affection, friendship and care.

2. Arts & Entertainment (cable channel) carries the *Lovejoy* TV series. Has anyone seen it? (For the non-cognoscenti, Lovejoy is a slightly fiendish antique dealer, rascal, con-man extraordinaire and undoubted lady's man.) Of course, the stories don't carry the same breadth (or occasional depth) of plot as *Jonathan Gash's books*. But they are amusing, occasionally. I don't think the TV Tinker is seedy enough.

3. Does anyone read *the Armchair Detective* mystery fanzine? Published out of NY, it has evolved into quite a fancy, respectable and still fannish mystery press equivalent of Locus. And the Winter 92 issue has Jeremy Brett on the cover, as well as it being the 25th anniversary issue.

4. *Edmund Crispin*. *Jane Langton*. Anyone read their books? Crispin's British mysteries, with his professor, are intriguing of course. But also witty, intelligent and very satisfying to read. Jane Langton makes one yearn for New England. Any other suggestions?

5. And the last. Has anyone gone to a *Bouchercon*, or to a regional mystery con? I've not, but am thinking of it. I remember when Bouchercon was in Milwaukee back in the early 80s and should've gone. What with my interest in Sherlock Holmes, the Canon and the rest of the writings, various British and American authors mentioned above and

others I've forgotten, a Bouchercon would probably be a diverting and educating con. Hopefully, like the most diverting and educating sf con I've ever attended: Noreascon in 1980 with the best of all of my worlds, friends, sercon with Isaac Asimov and his colleagues, lobster and Boston.

Well, for not saying much, I sure talked a lot.

III. Weird News From Indianapolis

I didn't write it. I just read it in the March 3rd and 11th editions of NUVO.

CREME DE LA WEIRD

In December, police in Genoa, N.Y., shot and killed farmer Rolf Rahn, 37, who had shot a plumber during an argument and then holed up for 16 hours. Rahn claimed that he was an alien and the plumber an android, and demanded that police provide him with a spaceship for his getaway.

III. What about ApaTech #77

Cover Did anyone buy a Lotto ticket #77? Seemed like a bookie sheet to me.

Rod Congratulations on yr karate test.//Say, how far is Lexington KY from Louisville? Now that I am in Indy for a few more months, it might be a nice weekend drive down there. But I am too late for Rubicon. Rivercon in July, eh? When? Have you ever met a fan from Louisville called Jim Payton? Do you go to Midwescon? Joa and I probably won't be at Marcon this year. May is a bit full already, and we're going to Ohio for the Dayton Hamfest in April.

Joa Thanks for yr compliments and publicity on my ham ticket. But as I have already publicly announced, *your adhoc explanations over dinner were probably the real reason why I passed the Technician's test*. If anyone can explain the mysterious goings-on of Yagi

antennas over bar-b-q ribs or the esoteric electronic meanderings of capacitors, resistors and transistors over tacos and margaritas, it's you. // Are you going to build a 70cm band cubical quad to wear on your head at this year's Hamfest? // Riguardante i tuoi commenti letteratureschi (se non e' una parola, beh...) dei libri di un certo Stefano Benni: con un nome cosi', dovrebbe meglio leggerlo in italiano. Forse, fa piu' senso della versione inglese, no?

Bill Well, so where you been hiding yourself kiddo? // All of yr praise for the Chicon programming is well-deserved, well-earned and not nearly enough of a homage. But then again, this is one member of the Bill Higgins cheerleading squad, so maybe I am biased. // Re yr ct Audrey for a Britianization routine for yr Am-English text. It would have to change yr intonation, intent, hue and colour. Sort of like go from "hiya doing folks" to "I hope this is a most terribly pleasant time of year for you, full of cheery good news and bloody good times." Seriously, I enjoy reading the Toronto Globe and Mail for their grammatical expressions. They sort of speak Brit-English with a Canadian accent; like listening to an Ontario person reading the Financial Times, eh...this bit of industrial action by the economy ... etc. // Indianapolis has country and contra dancing on Tuesday nights, if you ever want to come down this way.

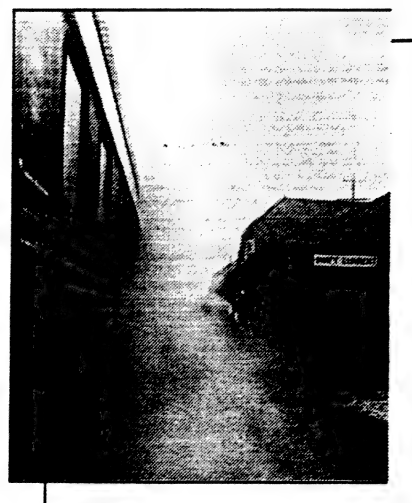
Dave&Susannah Re Dora's blondness: I hope it stays! My 8 month old "niece" Kay Lynn has blondish red hair, and hopefully she will keep it. She has one blond brother and another reddish-brown haired. Brown hair is soooo boring; I know, I've seen it in the mirror all my life. // Thanks for the Starwind. I don't find the idea of advertising offensive. Anything (within reason) to enlarge the magazine or increase its circulation.

Guy Birmingham...I liked it when we first moved there. I found our apt. there, and choose B'ham not so much for its affluence. Rather, it was about the only Detroit suburb that had a walkable downtown area. I have really come to like Royal Oak. With its street-level Grand Trunk Railroad

traffic, its shops, hardware stores, businesses and mix of yuppy and non-yuppy residents, it has a more real feeling about it than B'ham. Now, though, I find that I like smaller midwestern American cities more. Like St. Louis and Indianapolis. Places with real neighborhoods and real people. Chicago is still a real nice place because it still has real neighborhoods. You should go and visit the Polish neighborhood around Milwaukee and Diversey (Joa, help, are those the right cross streets?) or the Orthodox neighborhood on the west side by Holy Trinity Orthodox church. // I am sure I am going to enjoy reading yr paper. At first glance, I like yr clear writing style. But I've not finished it in time to ct on it.

Gabe/Audrey I loved yr headline! What's the status of the revised edition of the GT songbook? // Audrey, re time to read Usenet: tell me about it. I barely get through my mail in my once a week call to yr system. I still have stacks of notes to read in the railroaders forum. And I've not even touched the ham forum.// Thanks so much for all yr time and effort with ApaTech. It's keeps the home fires burning for us techies.//Take care you two, and why don't you stop by Indy some weekend? There are good things to do down here. It's also a lot friendlier than Detroit. Miss ya. Take care.

Train of Thought



CRUMBCRUNCHERS, INC.
P.O. Box 98
Ripley, OH 45167

Life moves on apace with us. Dora is walking (and getting into trouble constantly, tearing up drawers, Marlene's things, scribbling in books, etc.), talking constantly (though in some language we don't understand, for the most part). She has a definite idea of when Dave should be returning from work, and will go to the kitchen door and say "Dad-day" in a rather impatient, peremptory tone. She will also frequently go to the refrigerator and bang on its door demanding "Cheese!" (That rhymes with Cleese!)

She's old enough now to come bicycle riding with me, something that I haven't been doing for almost a year and a half. Since we've started riding, I've definitely come to know what the phrase "out of shape" means! Up to now, she's been riding in a baby backpack, but as she's over 20 pounds, it's getting more difficult to transport her this way. She's also very curious about things while she's riding on my back and will try to lean out of the pack, so that I almost lose my balance and fall.

Marlene is getting along fine in school. She just brought home her latest report which had mostly As and Bs on it. She's gotten more tidy with her handwriting (they're learning to write cursive, which really thrills her), though she got a bad mark for conduct. She has a tendency to get very upset when people tease her, and often gets the assignment of writing out on a piece of paper several times, "I must learn to control my emotions."

Our economic state is still definitely poverty level. Dave took on an interesting consulting job for a power plant in Pennsylvania in December which should definitely help things out a bit - the only problem is, he hasn't been paid yet. He is a qualified installer for some accounting and medical practice management software packages, so he has installed and conducted training sessions for some of these.

He's opening up a mental health clinic that would especially cater to people whose insurance doesn't cover mental health care or whose mental health care option under their insurance coverage has run out. He currently has a psychologist and social worker on staff, and a supervising psychiatrist. To make room for the clinic he's moved into a suite of office (some of which he will rent to other practitioners) - the rest of us haven't seen it yet.

Enough about us. This whole thing is so scary to contemplate that it's much easier to discuss more down to earth things - like the exceptionally balmy spring we're having. It's rather disquieting after the mild winter. People have been calling the newspaper office excitedly, reporting their first sighting of a robin - I could tell them that the robins didn't even bother to migrate this year! I've also just heard a Baltimore Oriole (now known as the Northern Oriole - the American Union of Or-

nithologists changed its name some time ago - about the same time they decided to call the Sparrow Hawks Kestrels, I think). They usually don't show up for another month and a half.

Until just a few hours ago, it was raining and thundering furiously. Today was the day the Lions Club had chosen for its Pancake Breakfast - "what a day for a fund-raiser!" said Dave. It's cleared off now, though, so hopefully they're getting some customers. (The rest of my family is still in bed, so I haven't had a chance to stop by for breakfast yet.)

This of course isn't the first rain we've had in the last few weeks. A storm a week or so ago (accompanied by a lot of wind) took down a sizeable chunk of tree in our back yard. The day before yesterday, another hunk fell off. Marlene was devastated, because the bit that broke off had held her rope swing. For some reason or other, no large limbs have crashed down on the deck or the roof (unless you count a few twigs on the carport roof). This is extremely fortunate - I don't know if I'd be able to cope with a hole in the roof of the dining room, when I have a hard time with groceries and gas bills!

Every body's talking about the books they've read recently; I'm afraid my contribution in this category will be rather meagre. I can start books easily - it's just getting them read after I begin that's the problem. Dave and I have been working on Morton Hunt's *The Universe Within* (an examination of the inner workings of the human mind) since October (I probably owe at least \$5 of library fines on this one - the librarians are very sweet and keep renewing it for me). I've also got Joseph Campbell's *The Power of Myth* "going" as well as Bernhard Anderson's *Understanding the Old Testament*. This last book I got through interlibrary loan - I agree with Bill, this is a great institution, but I'm still on chapter 4, where he's talking about the conflict between the Hebrew and Canaanite religions, and the book is due in only a few days!

A book I did manage to finish, however, is Julian Jaynes' *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*. If you've ever wondered why the gods or God don't talk to us directly anymore, as they did in the days of Ulysses and Samuel, this book will start you thinking. I'll say no more, but I will be including a review of it in an upcoming HOBSON'S (this same issue will contain what I call a "bicameral mind" story - something that I'm not sure is actually science fiction, but that I have to publish anyway).

My tenure as a church organist has come to an end - the church Board decided, after seven years, to fire me, for reasons that they refused to explain to me. I suppose the actual reason is that they had begun to resent having to pay me, although I was probably their smallest expense - about \$200 a year. Though I'll miss the organ - an instrument I got very fond of over the years - and playing for an audience - there are plusses as well. One of the largest is that I now have weekends free, and we can go off on excursions. I can also go to the church of my choice for the first time in seven years!

Well, I hear my family stirring upstairs, so I guess it's time to finish off here, get people up and dressed, and trek over to the pancake breakfast!

Later: Well, the day is no longer uneventful - Marlene managed to get bitten by a dog. And not by a vicious pit bull or German Shepherd either, but by a Shih Tzu. It took a chunk out of her thigh, and scratched up her other leg. She got stitched up at the health clinic (it was open this time), and is presently ensconced on the living room couch, making horrible faces as she tries to take the prescribed antibiotic. She's also eating Girl Scout cookies - I'm sure that box of Thin Mints will be demolished long before the evening's over!

Some room here for mailing comments! (Can you believe it?!)

ROD: Do you ever write any nonfiction? (Like maybe about martial arts? We have a rather neat martial arts story that needs a nonfiction companion piece!)

Do you have an agent? I get so many calls and letters from people who want to know the names of agents or who, even more oddly, want ME to be their agent. Somewhere they've gotten hold of the myth that to be a writer one must first of all have an agent, and they're all frantic to find one.

Marlene's spelling is as original as her handwriting. (Actually it's quite sensible too.) A sample that I found stuck in the last issue of the APA: Christmas is coming and all through the howse nohing was sturing not even a mowse. She is thrilled to be able to read cursive, though different people's unusual styles of handwriting sometimes puzzle her. Her most recent literary work is entitled "The Amasing Story of Dora." In this story, she and Dora were up in the church sanctuary during Sunday services, and Dora was observed "talking to the candels."

Having a family can really complicate things sometimes, so I certainly understand why many people decide to remain single or have no kids! There are so many events (like cons), organizations and places that are "anti-baby". The last con we went to was a Marcon when Marlene was about 2 1/2. (And they were much more "kid-friendly" than most of the other similar events we've tried to attend!) Too, there are a lot of things that having a family gets in the way of - I can't take off for a month to attend Space Camp, as I'd like, for instance! I ran into a real problem a few years ago when I wanted to attend a three month course for publishers sponsored by New York University. It sounded like a wonderful course, but everyone I talked to who was associated with the program advised me that it was a very bad idea for me to take off for such a long period when Marlene was at a very vulnerable, clingy stage in her life. These same people put me in touch with the Stanford University Publishing Course, which was much more amenable to families, but even that didn't work out, because child care was rather problematic. (We have a real life example of the effect of a kid's mother leaving her with other caretakers for extended periods - a friend of Marlene's, who's a year younger than she is - was shipped off to stay with her grandmother in Czechoslovakia for several months while her mom tried to get her life sorted out. When Anna came back she was the most clingy, frightened child who refused to speak English to anybody, even her mother. To make matters even more complicated, she'd missed the first few months of kindergarten, and had to make up all the work she'd missed to catch up with her class.)

Thanks for the invite to Rubicon - with my new-found weekend freedom we'd actually be able to attend!

Your recounting of your "bout" with tinnitus reminds me of my development of what seemed spookily like carpal tunnel syndrome. Since I play the organ and piano so much, this of course disturbed me. I even started wearing wrist braces to bed at night. Though I didn't make the connection at the time, this was also a period where I was playing an awful lot of Tetris on the Mac. David needed the computer at the office, so he took it away, and Tetris went with it. My carpal tunnel syndrome symptoms vanished fairly rapidly. The only thing I can't figure out is that I had numbness and tingling in both hands -

whereas, when one plays Tetris, it's only the right hand that really gets a workout.

BILL: I think I stuck in the bit about "Jacobethan architecture" mainly for Vali's benefit. Jacobethan is a coined word made from "Elizabethan" and "Jacobean". It first came into vogue in the 1830s when the Houses of Parliament were being planned; the architects were instructed to come up with a design with either Gothic or Jacobean elements (referring to the architecture of the reign of James I). Of course, the Gothic won out with the Houses of Parliament, but the Jacobethan style had entered the architectural world.

Buildings built in the style didn't really become popular until the 1890s. It was most often used in what my architecture textbook calls "educational architecture". A lot of high schools between the 1890s and the 1920s were built in the style, also buildings at colleges and universities. Pomerene Hall at Ohio State is one of these. Also many older YMCAs and libraries (the ones that were endowed by Andrew Carnegie, mainly!) are built in this style.

Enough about architecture already! Dave wants to know when somebody's going to invent a "Mistake-a-nym Finder" for those times when you write a correctly spelled but incorrectly used - like writing chemistry instead of chemical or in David's case, viscous instead of vicious. (So he wound up with a paragraph about "viscous cycles.")

Trillion Year Spree seems like a pretty decent book, though I haven't actually been able to plow all the way through it yet (see my comments of a couple pages back - I may write intelligent reviews but I usually write them without actually reading the entire book beforehand!). Speaking of SF books have you or anybody in the APA read Orson Scott Card's book about writing science fiction and fantasy? I'm hoping to get it through interlibrary loan so I can decide if I want to buy it - it's advertised in the Writers Digest Books catalog. I've been told it's quite good, but that Card makes some disparaging remarks about fanzines.

GUY: Good to hear from you! The paper on Galileo was very edifying. Interestingly enough, I read it shortly after I'd received a story which represented Galileo's wife as being responsible for thinking up most of the discoveries that have been credited to him. My knowledge of Galileo is so fuzzy that I didn't even know if he'd been married or not! The story wasn't so spectacular, however, that I felt justified in researching his marital status.

David recently attended a Zen retreat that was sponsored by the Cincinnati Zen Center - a Japanese Zen master, the abbot of a whole string of monasteries, held dharma talks and "presided" over the zazen sessions. Dave was especially thrilled because he said that if he were in Japan, he'd never have the opportunity to hear this guy speak, as he is so high up in the Buddhist hierarchy. It was a rather peculiar retreat, as the Zen Center doesn't have any residential facilities, so he came home each evening, and left again early in the morning, as he'd volunteered to chaffeur the master around town.

I've noticed that the market for nonfiction seems to be much more lucrative than fiction. However, this doesn't seem to deter people from writing fiction - more short stories wind up in our mailbox than I can ever hope to read alone. Even with three or four friends helping me out, I'm perpetually swamped. And I think I'm going to have to tell them, regretfully, that with my precarious financial situation, I'm going to have to drop them as readers. I figure I spend between \$20-\$40 a month in postage, and paying them for their reading services. Read this as saying that the magazine money is probably going to have to go to covering everyday family expenses, rather than running the magazine right now. I just hope I can pay it back someday!

NOTES FROM THE VADOSE ZONE

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I have been one of the lucky few in Exlog that has remained busy over the last 4 months. Work in the Gulf of Mexico has been down significantly. I have been glad to work anywhere. In recent months many people in Exlog have been working at jobs below their usual level, Computer Operators working as Mud Loggers and Mud Loggers working as Sample Catchers. On my present job our crew of 2 Mud Loggers and 2 Sample Catchers has a combined 60 years of Mud Logging experience.

It is likely that we will break the record for the fewest drilling rigs working in this country. The count as of 2/7/92 is 674. The old record is 663 set in July of 1942. It does not look like things will be improving anytime soon. The number of seismic crews making seismic surveys in the US is down almost 30% from the levels of last year. Since many oil and gas companies use seismic survey to delineate drilling prospects the number of crews working is a good indicator of drilling activity for the next 3 to 6 months. Things many have bottomed out but, there is no sign that things will be getting better anytime soon.

Our present problems can be traced to the low price of natural gas at the well head. The price of natural gas had fallen to as little as 95 cents per thousand cubic feet (Mcf) in July from a high of 1.75\$ Mcf in January. It has remained at about 1.00\$ Mcf. The price of natural gas is being squeezed from two directions. It can take anywhere from 8 to 10 years, from discovery, for oil or gas to make it to the markets from offshore production and 3 to 5 years from on shore production. This lag meant that new production, found during the boom years of 1978-1982 and 1984-1985, was coming to market just as the recession was reducing demand. The normal response to the situation is to shut in existing production until the price improves. But, the bad time that producers have had since the middle 80's have left many producers desperate for cash flow that they are willing to sell at any price just to keep money coming in. It will probably have to wait until the economy recovers for the situation to get better.

Because things have been so slow in the Gulf of Mexico, I have racked up a great deal of frequent flier miles. In the last 6 months my job has taken me to California, Singapore, Brunei, and Eastern Virginia. I spent much of September drilling a geothermal well on the Navy's China Lake Naval Weapons Center in the Mojave Desert. This was a new experience for me since we were drilling not for oil or gas but, for hot rocks. The drill site was at the far end of the Navy's Short

Rocket Sled test track. Although we were in no danger during normal operations, if there was an accident it was possible that debris might reach us. When the Navy would operate the sled, we would have to evacuate the drill site until the tests were over. We could count on a 4-5 hour break 3 or 4 times a week. The site had also been part of an artillery range some time in the past. We had to shut down once when several unexploded shells were uncovered while rigging up the location. It rained several times while I was there. Once it rained so hard that the water actually reached the ground. The rest evaporated before it hit the ground. We got a couple of days off so, I drove to Edwards Air Force Base and toured NASA's Dryden Flight Research Center. I narrowly missed seeing the Shuttle there. It had left the day before. I did get to see one of the SR-71's that NASA had recently received for the Air Force. It was smaller than I had imagined it to be.

After I left California, I had a grand total of 48 hours at home before I was on another airplane bound for Singapore. Exxon has many offices around the world and the office that handles Asia and the Pacific Region is in Singapore. Singapore became my base of operations in October and much of November. Singapore is a lovely city. I was slightly disappointed in that the city did not appear too different for many cities I had been in in the US. There were McDonalds and Burger Kings and even a K-Mart. It wasn't until I got out of the center of the city into the residential parts of Singapore that I could truly tell that I was in a foreign land. That and the fact that, for me at least, they were driving on the wrong side of the road. Since Singapore was formerly a British Colony, most everyone spoke English. The government in Singapore is very paternalistic. They like to do things for the good of their citizens. Even if nobody wants it. Singapore has undertaken a major clean up of the city and the streets are cleaner than any major city that I have even been in. You may have heard, during President Bush's visit there, that Singapore had banned the import of chewing gum because it littered the streets and jammed the doors of their subway trains. Books in Singapore are very expensive. A paperback may cost as much as 15\$US. So, there are book stores where you can rent or lease a book. If you return a book after 30 days, you can get as much as 60% of the cost of the book back. If you keep it longer you get less back. Books can be rented and returned many times so the price can come down to a more reasonable level.

Although our office was in Singapore, I did most of my work across the South China Sea off the coast of Brunei. Brunei is a small country on the north-west corner of the island of Borneo. It, like Kuwait, has benefited from being a small country sitting on top of a lot of oil. Much of this wealth has remained in the hands of the Sultan of Brunei, widely believed to be the richest man in the world. Brunei is a very muslim country. There is no alcohol allowed in the country. I was told, by a Geologist who worked for Brunei-Shell, that the main thing that one does for entertainment in Brunei was leave; either overland to Malaysia or by plane to Singapore or The Philippines.

Since the middle of December I have been working in Eastern Virginia about 60 miles south-south east of Washington D.C.. Texaco is drilling a series of four wells in eastern Virginia. I could be working here for a year or more. Because we are so close to Washington, this job has been a show job. We have had many groups of people brought here by Texaco to be given tours on the drilling site. The Press (including

TV), environmental groups, and even state and local representatives have been through here. I believe that Texaco would like to show these people, who would not ordinarily see a drilling operation, that we can drill a well cleanly and safely so they can be given access to area that have been off limits before.

After my first tour of duty in Virginia, I was driving to Illinois to visit my parents when I had an automobile accident. I was driving west on Interstate 70 just across the Indiana line from Ohio when it began to snow. I did not slow down enough. There was a car with a U-haul trailer ahead of me. When I tried to slow down and move into the passing lane, I lost control of my minivan on the slick pavement and hit the back of the trailer. The only lucky thing about the accident was that no one was hurt. The only damage to the trailer was a bent fender and scratches. On the other hand, I did more than 3500\$ damage to the front of my minivan and had to have it towed all the way to Illinois. I got off very lucky. It could have been much worse.

That is all that I have time for now. I hope that everyone is well and is having a better 1992 than I am.

P.S. We did it! The rig count of 2/14/92 was 661. They are projecting that the rig count will fall to the middle 500's, over the next 2 months, before it will begin to recover.

At the Last Possible Second...

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A zine for APA-Tech

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Quick — while it's not looking! Shoot!

The House Hunt

We've been hunting houses, and although we haven't shot any, we have seen a couple that are deserving of Guy Wicker and John McKenna's talents. One in particular is a small bungalow in Troy. The current occupants have glassed in the front porch, and extended the upstairs bedroom above it. Gabe stepped into that bedroom and thought he was going to fall through the floor. And in the words of our realtor, "You break it, you bought it."

Fortunately, not all of the houses have been of similar construction and repair. Although, to date, we have not yet found the house for us. We've been looking for a little over one month now, and have been inside of probably 30 houses. We've been looking at Bungalows (our favorite architecture at the moment), Ranches (the runner up), and the occasional Cape Cod. The only designs we aren't considering are Colonials and Tri-Levels. I don't like the rectangular look of Colonials, and since our stuff doesn't easily fit in a house without a basement, we had to rule out Tri-Levels.

We're planning on staying in the Greater Detroit area, most likely in Royal Oak, Madison Heights, Troy or Clawson. If those don't pan out, however, we will extend our search to include Warren, Roseville, and St. Clair Shores.

House-hunting is very time-consuming, as those of you who have purchased homes undoubtedly know. I wasn't prepared for the level of exhaustion it produces. I thought it'd be fairly straight forward and simple, since Gabe and I are both flexible and like a lot of different things. But, when you take into account the amount of money we have to work with, the areas we want to live in, and the odd things people have done to their homes, it starts getting tricky. We've seen gorgeous houses in expensive neighborhoods, inexpensive homes in yucky neighborhoods, and very run-down and shabbily repaired homes (often in good neighborhoods). We've also seen some okay homes with a few flaws — bedrooms that are too small to house both our bed *and* our bedroom furniture, ceilings that are too low to allow Gabe to walk upright underneath them, and kitchens without hope of installing a dishwasher (when you bottle your own beer, a dishwasher stops being a luxury and becomes a necessity).

And then there is the sheer exhaustion. We've been getting new listings from our realtor once or twice a week, checking them out (doing drive-bys) several week-nights, driving around on Saturdays looking at neighborhoods, and then going out on Sunday to open houses. By Sunday night I'm ready to collapse, and I usually do, by coming home (about 6 p.m.) and then going directly to bed.

Other Chores & Miscellaneous Problems

Just because we've been out looking at houses doesn't mean I get to skip my other chores. Cleaning the house has become all the more difficult since we've started to go through our possessions, trying to cull out the stuff we don't really need, use or want before we move. We have stuff piled everywhere. Fortunately, Purple Heart, The Kidney Foundation and the Public Library are having drives to collect unwanted clothing, household goods, books and/or magazines. I've disposed of 5 boxes of stuff so far, and I'm sure we'll have doubled that amount by the time we're through.

Then, as if the above wasn't enough, I'm still trying to log our finances in my computer, and keep track of my comics and our database of

addresses. And, for the nth month in a row, I'm having computer problems. Last month I got rid of my double-page monitor, and had switched completely over to the color VGA. Which, three weeks ago, died. We thought at first that it was the controller card, however, after swapping that out, the problem reoccurred. Then last week, just for grins & giggles I turned the thing on, and had it light up. So I did some work, only to end up watching as the screen got darker and darker until it simply turned black. So, now it's in the shop. With buying a house, one thing I won't be doing is replacing it with a different color monitor — at least not right away.

The State of the BBS

Monday, March 30th, Gabe installed the new (beta) release of the BBS software (Waffle). Things were fairly stable, but now they're not. His automated script program isn't working (due to running out of memory), and a few other things are working quite right. He's needs to put some time into it; however with house-hunting and getting ready to move, time is one thing he doesn't have.

Perhaps this situation will improve after we've moved into our own home. Although, lately my

friends have been warning me that once you have a house, you can never say you're bored — there's always something that needs to be done. If we ever have money again, I'd like to add another telephone line and a bigger hard drive to the system. And that will necessitate a new modem, but that's okay, because the 9600 baud modem I got Gabe a few months ago is no longer state of the art, and there are some much better ones out there.

Gabe apologizes for his silence

Gabe wanted me to say that he will be writing an article soon (perhaps at MINICON, which is where we will be headed tomorrow morning).

